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ABSTRACT

Reported are highlights of elementary school students' responses to the question: "What good things would you tell your friends about this school?" Students were enrolled in eight unusually successful elementary schools participating in the U.S. Department of Education's 1985-86 Elementary School Recognition Program. Composed of 6 to 12 members, student groups included at least one representative from each grade level, including kindergarten. Schools varied in size of student population, racial mix, percentage of low income families, and population characteristics of the community. (RH)

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WHAT STUDENTS WOULD TELL THEIR FRIENDS ABOUT THEIR UNUSUALLY SUCCESSFUL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

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Among the challenges facing Site Visitors in the U. S. Department of Education's Elementary School Recognition Program* was to collect data from very young children about special features of their school. One question which seemed to work well was, "What good things would you tell your friends about this school?"

I met with groups of six to twelve children in each of eight unusually successful elementary schools participating in the Department's 1985-86 program. The groups included at least one representative from each grade level, including kindergarten, represented in the school. And the younger children became just as involved as the older children in identifying good things about their school. Highlights from each group's responses follow:

Grades 4-5; just under 400 students; 95% White; 8% from low income families; suburban community of less than 40,000

What would students tell their friends about this school? "The kids and teachers are very nice and they have good equipment outside." A first grade student, who was first to speak to this question said, "I like the intramurals after school, and student jobs." (Opportunities are provided for students to do meaningful work in the school from working in the kitchen to helping teachers in classroom to earn points for special recognition.)

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*The purpose of the Elementary School Recognition Program is to identify and call attention to a national group of unusually successful elementary schools. The program recognized 270 private and public schools in its first year (1985-86).

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Several students mentioned individual teachers and other staff members. Some other responses follow: "The computer lab." "The School Patrol." (Members of the School Patrol monitor entrance ways and corridors of the building in the morning, at noon, and at the close of school.)

One student said, "I like it when you have a birthday. They celebrate a lot here. They announce your name on the PA and you get to have lunch with the principal."

Other responses by the students relating to what they would tell their friends about this school were: "You get awards if you don't get a pink slip." "When you do something nice for another person, you get a yellow slip." (Pink slips are given by teachers to students for improper behavior. Yellow slips are given to students when they are "caught doing something good.)

"I would tell my friends about our assemblies which recognize you in front of the whole school." (School assemblies twice a month recognize student efforts and accomplishments for behavior and for academic success and report on other matters relating to the school. One classroom usually receives special recognition during each assembly and that class puts on a short performance of their choice at the end of each session.)

Another student said, "I like this school because you know they care about you. The teachers always help you with your problems." He added, "Everyone is nice to you."

"The school makes you feel good about yourself," observed another. One student new to the school this year said, "On the first day of school they don't pressure you. I felt scared but the teacher understood." A first grade

student said, "I feel good at this school because they tell you what's happening. They tell you what you're going to do and how you're going to do it."

Grades K-6; just under 600 students; 51% White; 40% Hispanic; 8% Black; one-third from low income families; small town of less than 25,000 near major city

What are the good things about this school students would tell their friends? The students' responses to this question follow:

"The teachers are helpful."

"The school has fairs." (Science Fairs; Art Fairs; etc.)

"If you have a problem, teachers will try to help. They won't give up."

"The teachers help after school and work with you."

"There's always something to look forward to."

"If you are the most improved in your class, you get to go to lunch with the principal."

"Big computer lab."

"Lots of good books to read and Super Slueth." (Super Slueth is a reading and reference-motivation game students can play to see who is the first to identify a geographic location or something in the plant or animal kingdom from clues periodically posted in the Learning Center."

"The reading program."

"They have special programs all the time and a lot of field trips."

"We have a really big playground."

"There are different levels of math, reading and spelling. You don't have to stay behind. You have your own pace."

Grades 5-8; just under 300 students; 95% White; less than 3% from low income families; suburban community of less than 25,000

The things about this school students would tell their friends included: "It is small enough to get to know everyone." "The teachers are easy to work with." "There are fun things to do, and you can play any sport." And a 7th grader added, "There are no drugs in our school."

"How does the school feel?" I asked. Student responses were, "Nice." (8th grader) "Just like being home; only better." (8th grader) "It's friendly. If you're new, somebody will show you around for sure." (a 5th grader who was new). "It feels like you belong." (an 8th grader)

Grades K-5; just over 400 students; 93% White; one-third from low income families; small town of less than 25,000

What are the good things students would tell their friends about this school?

The initial list included nice teachers, a good principal, nice people, special activities, a good library, and field trips.

One student added, "They teach social studies good." Another said, "And they stress math."

A student said, "They have special programs and presentations, like puppet shows." Another said, "You have fun here and you learn some good things."

Grades K-6; nearly 350 students; 53% Black; 46% White; 70% from low income families; urban community

Here are some things students in this school would tell their friends: "Teachers are nice and they help you to get ahead." "Learning Programs." "Classes and many awards." "The principal." "It's just a good school." "It has fun sports." "The library."

Other students' answers to the question about what they would tell their friends about their school included good education, you can make friends here, have fun, athletic teams after school, good academics, nice teachers, and field trips.

One student said, "You feel like people here like you." Others pointed to teams (student) in reading, teams in social studies, teams in science, and teams in math as things they liked about the school.

Grades 1-5; just over 600 students; 85% White; 15% Black; 7% from low income families; suburban community of less than 25,000

Here are the good things students would tell their friends about their school.

"Recess." "Good games." "The teachers." "You can buy your lunch if you don't want to make it." "Good principal."

"A lot of room." "We learn a lot." "The teachers are nice without being too strict." "They have a good sense of discipline." "A lot of activities." "A good gym." "The food's good, most of the time." "Equipment for the playground." "They keep it clean here." "The library." "Readathon."

"Teachers are nice." "Do a lot of interesting things." "They let us share our ideas." "You get to participate in anything you want to participate in." "People who work here are really nice." "Teachers understand your thoughts and feelings."

Grades K-5; nearly 700 students; 85% White; 13% Black; 15% from low income families; suburban community of nearly 80,000

Some of the things students would tell their friends about this school follow: "It is clean." "They have very nice teachers." "They have neat

teachers here." "There are a lot of activities." "They have good food." "They let your parents know what is going on at school."

Students continued listing what they would say to others about this school: "It is fun." "You have a chance to choose what you want to do." "Teachers here understand you." "They don't think you're different because you're another color."

As they talked further about the school, the students said there are many special events and programs including "parties on holidays." They cited classes for hearing impaired and for other students who need special help. Some noted the Drama, Art, and Creative Writing Club and intramurals after school.

One student said he liked the school "Because the nurses didn't just say 'Go back and try it again.' They try to see what's the matter."

K-5; nearly 400 students; 94% White; 6% from low income families; suburban community of just over 3,000

Here are some things the students said they would tell their friends about their school:

"We have nice teachers."

"We get to change for some of our subjects." (The school is departmentalized for science in grades 1-5; for language arts and social studies in grade 5; and in physical education, music, art, computer lab, and library for all grades.)

"The kids are nice."

"You don't get bored by doing one thing for a long time and you don't do the same thing every day."

"The teachers are always willing to help you out."

The students mentioned the PAL (Program for Accelerated Learning), computers, the "big program in art," and the music program as some of the good things they would tell their friends about their school.